

Message Text

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65 60

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-12 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 EB-07 XMB-02 AID-05 AF-06 EA-06 COME-00 SIL-01

LAB-04 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /098 W
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R 271051Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2457

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KARACHI

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 0963

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: MARR, MV, UK

SUBJ: FUTURE OF GAN

REF: (A) LONDON 1110 (B) LONDON 2947 (NOTAL)

(C) COLOMBO 0897 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: UK HIGH COMMISSIONER SMEDLEY,(WHO
VISITED MALDIVES EARLIER THIS MONTH, TELLS US MALDIVIANS
ARE RESISTING BRITISH DECISION TO WITHDRAW FROM GAN
NEXT SPRING. SMEDLEY HAS URGED MALDIVIANS TO THINK
IN TERMS OF CONVERTING GAN TO CIVILIAN-TOURIST USE
BUT MALDIVIANS WANT BRITISH TO CONTINUE TO OPERATE
AIRSTRIIP AND TO CONTINUE PAYMENTS TO SOME 800-ODD
LABORERS AT GAN. SMEDLEY INDICATED BRITISH UN-
LIKELY AGREE TO SUCH PROPOSALS. GSL AIR VICE MARSHAL
MENDIS REPORTS HE AND MALDIVIAN BUSINESS MAGNATE
ALI MANIKU ARE LOOKING FOR CIVILIAN USES FOR GAN
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BUT THUS FAR HAVE NOT LINED UP ANY CLIENTS. END

SUMMARY.

2. BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER SMEDLEY TOLD AMBAS-
SADOR THAT DURING HIS MARCH 15-16 VISIT TO MALDIVIES
HE DID NOT SUCCEED IN WORKING OUT AN UNDERSTANDING
WITH MALDIVIAN GOVERNMENT RE BRITISH PLANS TO WITH-
DRAW.

3. AS REPORTED REFTEL C, IN ABSENCE DEPOSED PRIME
MINISTER ZAKI, BRITISH TEAM, INCLUDING TWO OFFICIALS
FROM LONDON. MET WITH FINANCE MINISTER SATTAR,
FISHERIES MINISTER HILMEY DIDI AND ATTORNEY GENERAL
SHIHIB. SMEDLEY REAFFIRMED BRITISH INTENTION
TO WITHDRAW FROM GAN BY APRIL 1976 AND URGED MAL-
DIVIANS TO EXPLORE CIVILIAN USES FOR ISLAND. SPECI-
FICALLY, SMEDLEY SUGGESTED MALDIVIANS CONSIDER CON-
VERTING GAN INTO TOURIST COMPLEX AND POSSIBLE STAGING
AREA FROM WHICH TOURISTS MIGHT BE TRANSPORTED TO MALE AND
OTHER NORTHERN ATOLLS (SEE COLOMBO 2000, JULY 17,
1974) AND TO NEARBY COUNTRIES. BRITISH OFFERED TO UNDERWRITE
COST OF A CONSULTANT TO ASSIST GOM IN RECONVERSION PLANS.

4. MALDIVIAN TRIUMVIRATE DID NOT REACT FAVORABLY TO
BRITISH PROPOSAL BUT INSTEAD REQUESTED HMG TO RE-
CONSIDER ITS PLAN TO PHASE OUT OF GAN. IF THIS WERE
NOT FEASIBLE, GOM PROPOSED THAT BRITISH A) CONTINUE
TO MAINTAIN OPERATION OF AIRSTRIP AND B) CONTINUE
FINANCIAL PAYMENTS TO 800-ODD LABORERS WHO NOW WORK
AT GAN. (THE CURRENT BRITISH MILITARY CONTINGENT
NUMBERS ABOUT 400.) SMEDLEY REAFFIRMED HMG'S DESIRE
TO PULL OF OF GAN IN EARLY 1976 BUT SAID HE WOULD
REPORT GOM REQUEST BACK TO LONDON, HE DID NOT EXPECT
HMG'S REPLY UNTIL APRIL AT EARLIEST.

5. SMEDLEY TOLD AMB HE WAS NOT AT ALL SANGUINE
HMG WOULD LOOK FAVORABLY UPON MALDIVIAN PROPOSAL SINCE
PRIMARY REASON FOR BRITISH WITHDRAWAL WAS CONTINUED
FINANCIAL BURDENS OF GAN WHICH WOULD BE ONLY PARTIALLY
RELIEVED IF HMG TOOK ON CONTINUING COMMITMENTS SUGGESTED
BY MALDIVIANS. HE NOTED THAT SHORTLY AFTER HIS DEPAR-
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TURE FROM MALE RADIO MALDIVES HAD BROADCAST THE TWO
GOM PROPOSALS IN DIVEHI, PRESUMABLY TO ASSURE POPU-
LATION OF GAN THAT IT WAS MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO PRO-
TECT THEIR FUTURE. RECALLING THAT TWICE DURING PAST
20 YEARS THERE HAD BEEN POLITICAL TENSION AND SEPARATIST
MOVEMENTS IN THIS SOUTHERN-MOST ATOLL,
SMELDEY SPECULATED GOM WAS CONCERNED ABOUT POLITICAL
PROBLEMS THERE IF GAN WERE SHUT DOWN NEXT SPRING.

6. SMEDLEY SAID THAT WITH ZAKI'S DEPARTURE FROM SCENE MALDIVIAN TRIUMVIRATE SEEMED SOMEWHAT UNSURE OF THEMSELVES BUT NONETHELESS GAVE IMPRESSION OF WANTING TO BARGAIN LIKE "ORIENTAL BAZAAR MERCHANTS." HE EXPLAINED THAT BECAUSE GOM UNWILLING TO DISCUSS ALTERNATIVE AT GAN AT THIS POINT, HE DID NOT PURSUE DISCUSSIONS ON 2-3 MILLION POUND HMG AID PACKAGE (REFTEL A). HE AFFIRMED, HOWEVER, THAT IF BRITISH DO EXTEND ASSISTANCE, THEY HOPE TO USE SOME MULTILATERAL MECHANISM SUCH AS ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK.

7. IN ANOTHER CONVERSATION ON GAN THIS WEEK, SRI LANKA'S AIR VICE MARSHAL MENDIS GAVE EMBASSY BRIEF REPORT ON HIS ONVERSATION WITH MALDIVIAN BUSINESS MAGNATE ALI MANIKU SHORTLY AFTER ZAKI'S REMOVAL. MANIKU HAD EMPHASIZED PRESIDENT NASIR'S CONTRIBUTION TO COUNTRY, NOTING THAT HE WAS FATHER OF MODERN MALDIVES AND HAD BEST INTERESTS OF COUNTRY AT HEART. ZAKI, BY CONTRAAST, WAS CHARACTERIZED AS POOR ADMINIS-TRATOR WHO HAD MISMANAGED GOM'S FINANCES. (MANIKU'S COMMENTS REINFORCE EARLIER REPORTS HE LINED UP WITH NASIR IN DECISION OUST ZAKI.)

8. MANIKU REPORTEDLY GAVE MENDIS, WHO IS ADVISER TO AIR MALDIVES, AUTHORITY FIND ALTERNATIVE USES FOR GAN WHILE MANIKU ALSO PLANS EXPLORE ALTERNATIVES. MENDIS SAID A POSSIBLE USER WAS SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS WHICH WANTED ESTABLISH SERVICE BETWEEN JOHANNESBURG AND HONG KONG BUT IT HAD BEEN DENIED LANDING RIGHTS IN COLOMBO ON POLITICAL GROUNDS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED, HOWEVER, THAT EVEN IF SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS WERE PERMITTED TO LAND AT GAN, THIS ALONE WOULD NOT
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MAKE GAN A VIABLE PROPOSITION. WHAT WAS NEEDED, MENDIS SAID, WAS TIE-IN WITH ONE OR MORE MAJOR EUROPEAN TOURIST AGENCIES WHICH WOULD BRING TOURISTS TO GAN ON CHARTER FLIGHTS, MAKE USE OF GOOD EXISTING ACCOM-MODATIONS THERE, AND EMPLOY LOCAL LABOR.

9. AS FAR AS MENDIS AWARE, ALL FUTURE THINKING ABOUT GAN WAS IN TERMS OF COMMERCIAL USE. HE HAD NOT HEARD OF ANY PLANS BY OTHER POWERS TO ESTABLISH MILITARY PRESENCE IN GAN FOLLOWING DEPARTURE BRITISH.
VAN HOLLEN

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